

Gender and Space: Balancing Roles and Works of Indian Women Before and During Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

The entire world has experienced a catastrophic event which has changed the view of people upon hygiene, health and work load distribution in a different way. The current paper intends to observe and bring the ground reality of work load and roles distribution among the family members despite of gender. The paper has been prepared based on the data collected from round the country. An Indian family are basically running upon the women in terms of household works and depends upon the men in terms of financial support. However, the scenario of the households has dramatically changed during the Covid-19. The entire world including India is connected with internet services due to the protocol and curfews during the period. Social media has spread the sharing of household workload by men widely. Various celebrities and influencers have also parted openly in equal household work. Yet the paper intends to identify if such a scene of work distribution and roles played before and during Covid-19 are temporary or going to be intact post Covid-19 as well. The balancing of roles and household work by a woman in an Indian household has been empirically observed in the paper for better visualisation from the ground level.

Keyword: Covid-19, Gender, Work, Role, Household.

INTRODUCTION

The world has been through various catastrophes and came across numerous changes inside and out. Be it in the natural habitat or in the socially constructed world, moulded out of the human and environment relationships since ages. Along witnessing the several physical world calamity, human have also confronted with man-made destructions. Such as World War I and II, political outrage, economic downfall, conflicts based on social and cultural assets and deaths of many due to world-wide medical failure, etc. COVID-19, is no exceptional to such man-made drastic situation. It has brought into several changes in every economic sector, political strategies, social and cultural activities and many more. The most dangerous effect of COVID-19 has been upon the human health in general and has snatched countless lives that could not manage to defeat it. Along with the physical health, its harmful effect has able to make space in the human mindset; leading to increase in social violence in general and domestic interfere in particular.

Before the COVID Pandemic outbreak in India, the issues related to common gender (male, female) as well as the LGBTQ community were prevalent at its peak. Inequality, unjust activities based on gender in both the public and private space can be encountered every next hour. The notion of patriarchy in

India has always given the wings to have happen partial justice to women at different scales by misguided men, in the name of patriarchy.

The counts of crime against women of all age were already increasing at an alarming rate, according to the National Crime Record Bureau of India. Cases comprising of social injustice and domestic violence were ample enough to portray the condition of an Indian women being at risk. For many women on a daily basis, leading a healthy life with equal share of respect and opportunity along with protection of her dignity is no less than a challenge.

Ever since the increasing rate of COVID cases during the early months of 2020 the country has declared nationwide lockdown on 24th March, 2020, it was initially declared for 21days. It was done for the safety and to manage and reduce the spread of infection among the people. Later on, there were series of lockdowns, partial lockdowns and curfews were launched by the central government and state government in separate as well considering the situation. Every institution both private and public was shut and people were trapped inside their homes, except the essential services and frontline service providers. In one hand, during that time the crime against women in public space was experiencing decreases in the count of cases. On the other hand, crime rates like domestic violence and human trafficking rose at a very rapid rate. Domestic violence as such includes physical torture, mental or psychological harassment and abuses, as well as increase in household chores and unpaid work.

OBJECTIVE

1. To study the roles of women in public and domestic space.
2. To observe the changes in roles played by women before, during and after pandemic.
3. To know the impact of household work upon professional work.
4. To understand the balancing of works of public and private spaces.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the fulfilment of the study consists of two main techniques-

Primary data collection- The study has been conducted based on the data collected by using the set of questionnaires framed out of Google form. The data are collected virtually without coming into direct contact with the respondent, due to COVID restrictions. For the collection of data, random sampling method has been used. A total of 100 sets of data have been collected from 100 different respondents randomly during 2019, 2020 and 2022 respectively.

GENDER	TOTAL
MALE	45
FEMALE	55
	100

Table No1.- Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

Secondary data collection- For the study the secondary sources of data collection has also been used for the support and conceptual framework. The secondary sources are journals, Canadian Official Report, United Nation Reports, and book sections, etc.

ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND DOMESTIC SPACE

Women have always been considered as an emotional thinker than a rational thinker, soft hearted and kind since time immemorial. Because of having such nature, women moreover have to face unequal share of justice and many challenges in life.

Every individual woman has multiple roles to play in her lifetime. Be it a role of daughter, sister, mother, wife, daughter-in-law, etc. Yet whatever role a woman plays, has to give her every bit to maintain the healthy relationship either out of love or fear. As India practises patriarchal society in majority. Such societies, follow certain old notions like women has to be seated at home being fully dependent on their family or husband. Due to such societal norms majority of Indian women are confined to their household chores, raising and caring children, etc. out of love and fear in contrary. Irony of the life of women is that, to fulfil the wishes and desires of others, her personal liberty and dreams of life remains unnoticed.

However, the women who could manage to chase their life goals and make a place in a male dominated public space have to confront many challenges on the way. The first challenge comes from home itself since the beginning of her childhood. In India, where the girls get barely the opportunity of education due to reasons such as finance, early marriages, large population in family, etc. Despite of the above reasons, the most important one is, if a girl child goes to school or college, there will be no one to do the household works and look after her other brother and sister if any. Moreover, it was an unprofitable deal to educate girls in India. Because ultimately, she will be married off and her education will not feed the family. The second challenge is, even if a girl managed to get educated, it is very difficult to get job opportunities in a male dominated society. Earlier, no job was formally designed for women, considering a woman not being suitable for public space. Later on, the notion changed and women started to get job in public space. Yet the role of a woman in public space was never being appreciated and her share was never equal to men.

The main challenge for women comes in balancing the role in public and domestic space. Women who were assigned for domestic work has to divide the time to complete both the works on time without any help from other gender in general. Moreover, it can be said that, working in a public sphere is not suitable for women who also have responsibilities of maintaining house at the same time without any help.

ENGAGEMENT STATUS	FEMALE	MALE
EMPLOYED	19	18
STUDENT	27	20
NON WORKING	12	12

Table No2.- Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

The above table describes the total number of engagement status as employed, student and non working male and female respondent from the survey conducted for the study through.

1. BEFORE PANDEMIC

The following graph has been prepared out of the survey conducted by collecting data from 100 respondents that describes the distribution of total male and female population involved in different levels of household works before pandemic.

Here, the figure has managed to represent the scenario of the maximum involvement of female in household works than by male. Here, female population despite of being engaged either as employed or student/scholar, the level of their engagement in maintaining household work was also prevalent. Women have to balance their time in both the space due to which the quality of their professional work gets detained, because the women gives more of her importance to her family. It is so because of the legacies trickled down from generations especially in patriarchal society that women is suppose to be dependent upon their families.

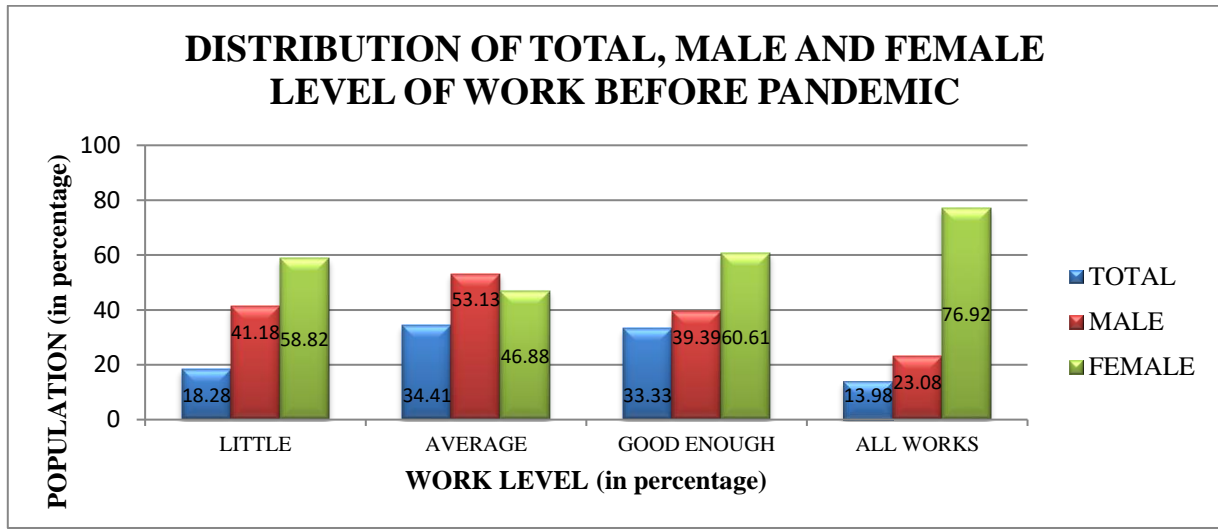


Fig-1. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

The following figure shows another trend of involvement of opposite gender of the respondent’s family members in household work before pandemic. Despite of having more female respondents, the level of working is high among female that shows that the male population here in also portrait that female have to maintain home. On the contrary, the female respondent has also put light on their male counter parts of being involved in household works. Here, the point can be raised in the ‘average’ and ‘good enough’ section of male, that is it the real scene in practical or it is a manipulated response of female who thinks more like an emotional being than rational. Several points can be raised in this part.

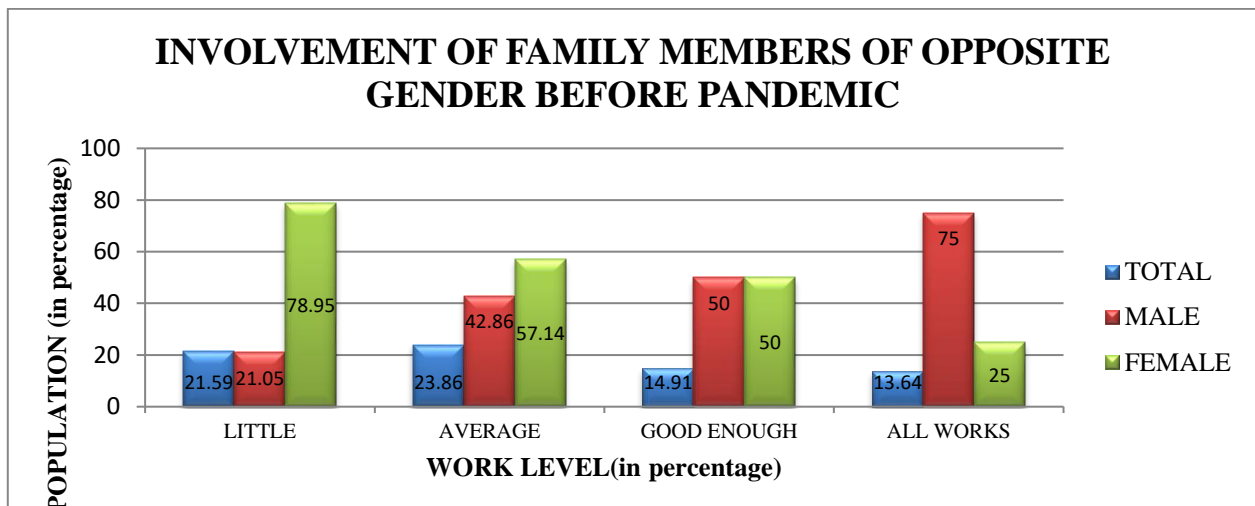


Fig-2. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

2. DURING PANDEMIC

During the pandemic when almost entire population was trapped at home, the engagement of both female and male were high in household work. In several social media platforms, many encouraging videos and blogs were posted where the male working in the kitchen and doing household works. It can be considered as a trend by then and also as the promotion of awareness towards COVID-19 and equality in sharing of works and quality time with the family members through creative work staying at home.

Here, the following figure no.3 and figure no.4 shows the involvement of male and female in different work level and also their opposite gender’s work involvement respectively during the pandemic. The trend of male workers in the household choir has increased during pandemic relatively higher than before. Do doubt, pandemic has brought into many changes in human life and level of work in household despite of gender can be counted as one. But the question again rises if that change is temporary for time being till the world normalises or it will remain like permanent and will not fade with time.

Here the figure also shows a downfall rate in male’s level of working in “good enough’ and ‘all works’ section in comparison to female. It can be sited that despite of increase in household work by men, the work done by female has not decreased at a relatable rate. The possible reason could be the WFH i.e. Work From Home, through which services from home instead of offices has incorporated. The second reason could be ‘women is home and is used to works, she will do it’. The third possible reason could be the increase in work load due to the presence of every member of the family and doing creative works in their leisure time, which automatically invites extra load of works upon the women.

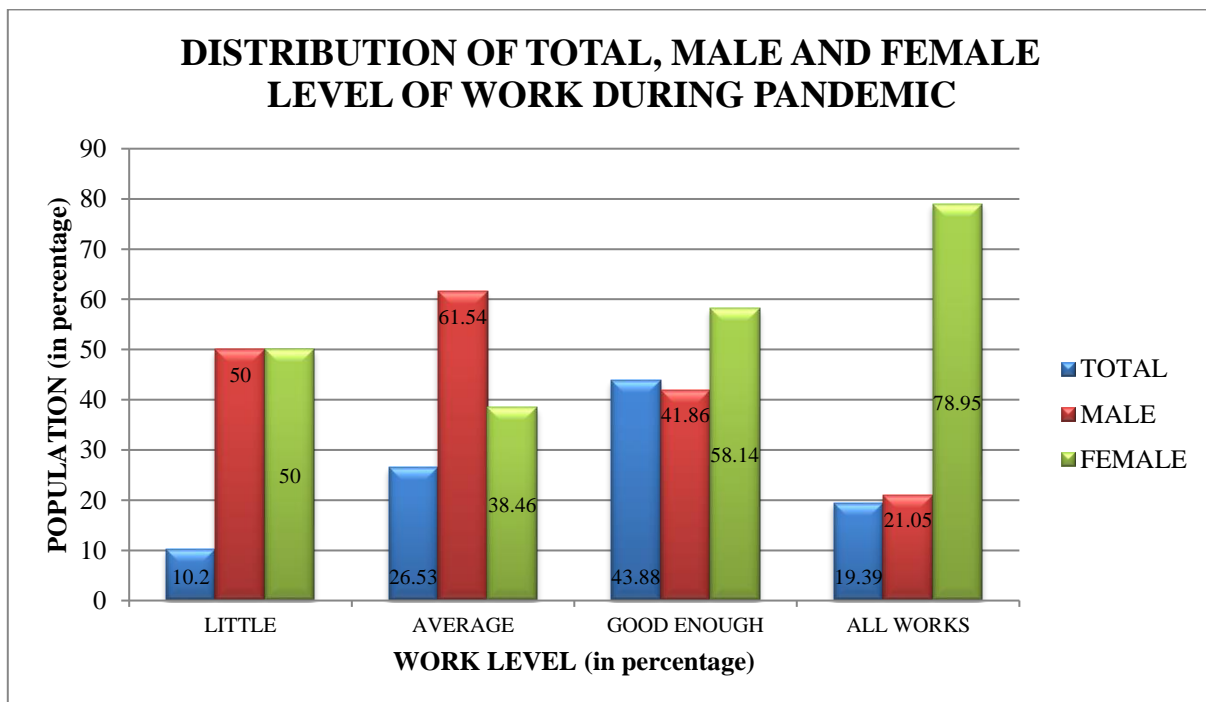


Fig-3. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

Whereas, through the figure no.4 it can be again clearly seen that the rate of work in different level has fluctuated records in between. That shows according to the male respondent that their female counter

parts are being helped by them and their work load has been shared. Whereas, in the data of ‘all works’ the percentage of women working is way higher than that of the time before pandemic. This shows that although men are involved in working yet the level of work they do lies in between ‘little’ ‘average’ and ‘good enough’, which is a gradual increase for sure. Whereas, on the opposite women engaged less before pandemic had to involve in household work more during the pandemic as all the public space works are closed. It is here again can be seen as before that, perhaps the responses from the female again were given partially based on emotional thinking and respect for their counter parts.

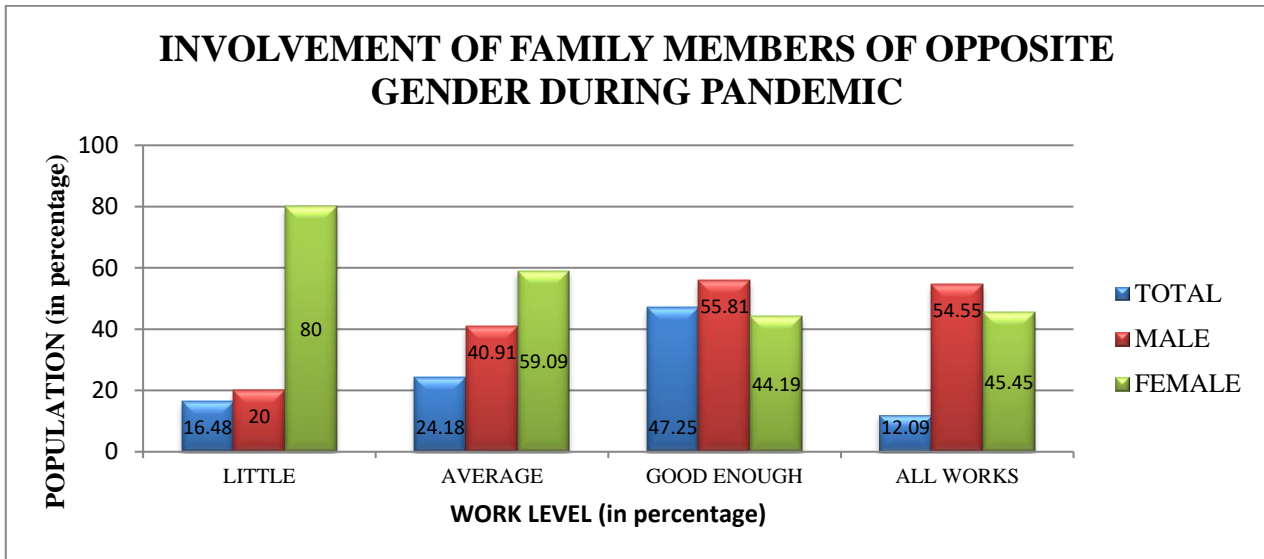


Fig-4. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

IMPACT OF HOUSEHOLD WORK ON PROFESSIONAL WORK

The household work does have immense impact on the professional work of women. Women have to balance both and on that race the quality investment in professional work gets impacted the most. As mentioned earlier, in the introduction about the levels of impact and influences of household responsibilities on women in every stages of life.

1. BEFORE PANDEMIC

Through the figure it is clearly shown that women have the maximum impact than men. The impact can be on the quality of job, quality of education and quality invested on the recreational and self care work for the women. The impact level is directly associated with the level of work shared by the opposite gender in the family. It is directly proportionate to each other, the lesser the involvement of sharing works, higher the impact in the professional work. As from the figure it is shown that as the involvement of men in household work was less in the previous figures, thus the impact of household work was less in each level of impact upon their professional work.

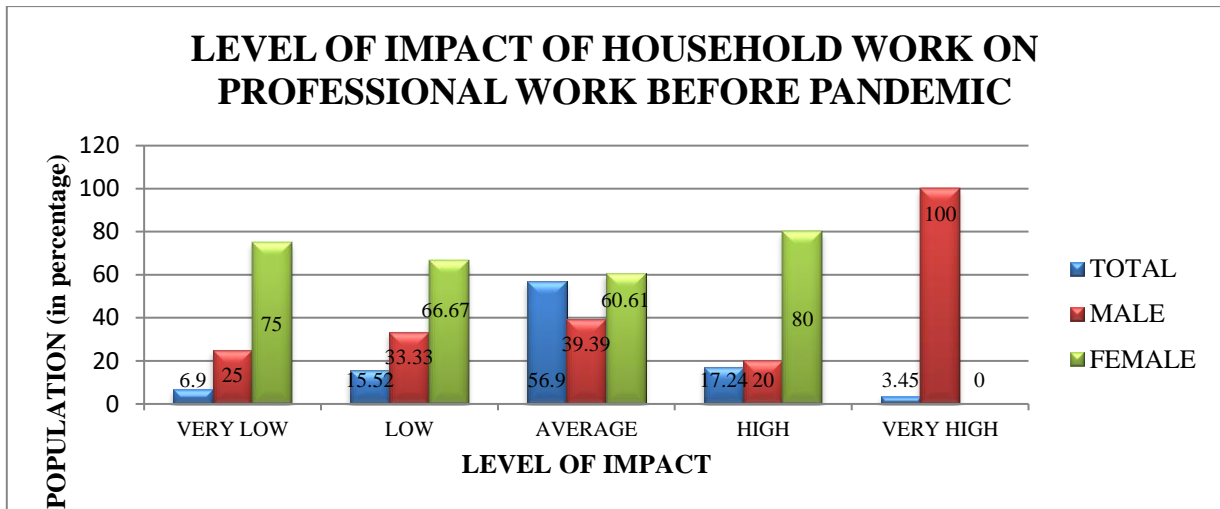


Fig-5. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

2. DURING PANDEMIC

During pandemic situation has been very crucial for the female mostly because they are trapped at home and they are bound to invest their best time in maintaining the house as responsibility as well as burden to many women. During this time, not just the female but the impact has also been observed among male. Many of the employees got removed from jobs and they ended up doing household works which has increased the cases of domestic violence. They were unable to engage in other jobs as well. For those men who had to work from home also faces the impact of household responsibilities, disturbing their professional privacy and performance. The same goes for women, many of the women are also removed from jobs and are devastated with the economic constraints. For those women who are engaged in any jobs are also very much influenced by the fact of staying at home. They are unable to make proper time for their official works due to the responsibilities of home. Students were already in panic situation for their carrier and above that the household duties hindered most of their precious time instead of investing in productive work.

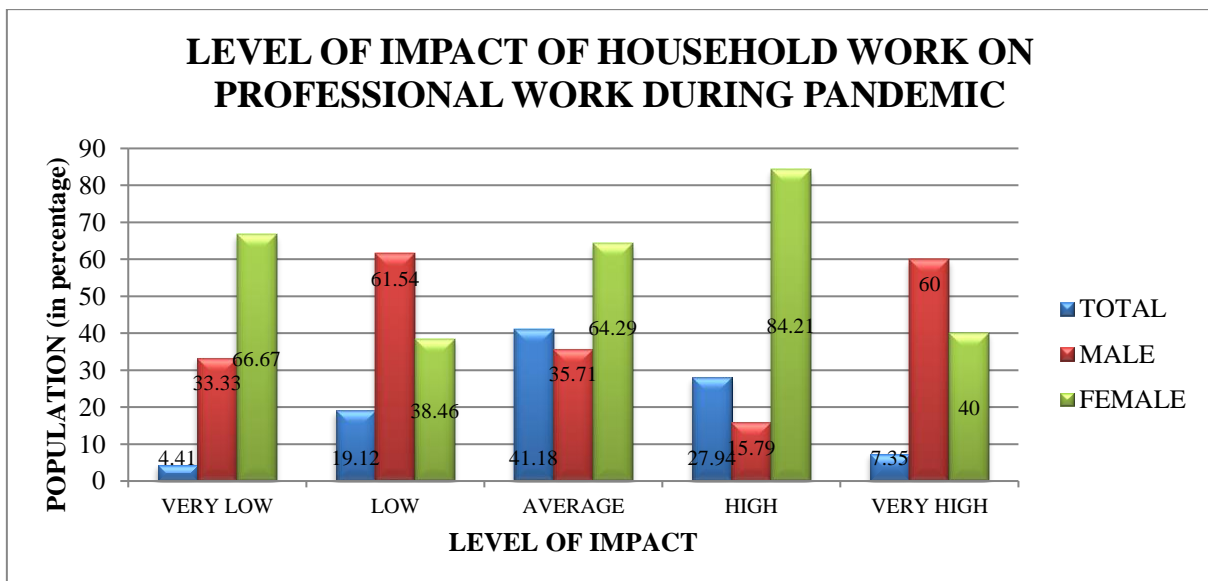


Fig-6. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

BALANCING AND COMPROMISES

The following figure no.7 is also curved out from the collected data that intends to show the impact of household work on the women that are engaged as employee, student/scholar and also the non-working women during pandemic. It clearly shows that the maximum impact was on the student at all the levels of impact. The reasons could be they are unable to go out for studies and they are involved in household works that makes their potential time to go in vain. Second reason could be the pressure of family members to learn household work instead of study. Third could be the finance as many of the parents have lost their income. Forth could be early marriage, even during the risk of pandemic, which is associated with the financial constrains of the families. The most important reason could be for those who can work from home, but due to the household work load they are unable to mänge time and work for their professional life. Such women are very much bound to invest their time in household work due to family pressure, work load, etc.

For the working women, the impact is relatively less in comparison to the students because all the public sector was closed due to the pandemic. That has provided them ample of time to invest in household work, which was not possible before. Despite of that fact, the women employee was also affected by household responsibilities. The reasons could be, they are unable to manage time to do professional duties through Work From Home mode. School teachers have to involve in video classes, virtual meets and online exams etc, of which they were hardly aware of before pandemic.

For the non working women, there is hardly any difference in the impact of household work on them. They had to work hard before pandemic without being paid and without any leave; they are still working the same way during pandemic. The life of a woman not engaged in any professional work has looked aside their personal liberty, wishes and goals of life. The non working women have turned completely dependent on their families. These can be considered as the impact of patriarchy and the influence of legacies trickling down from women to women through generations.

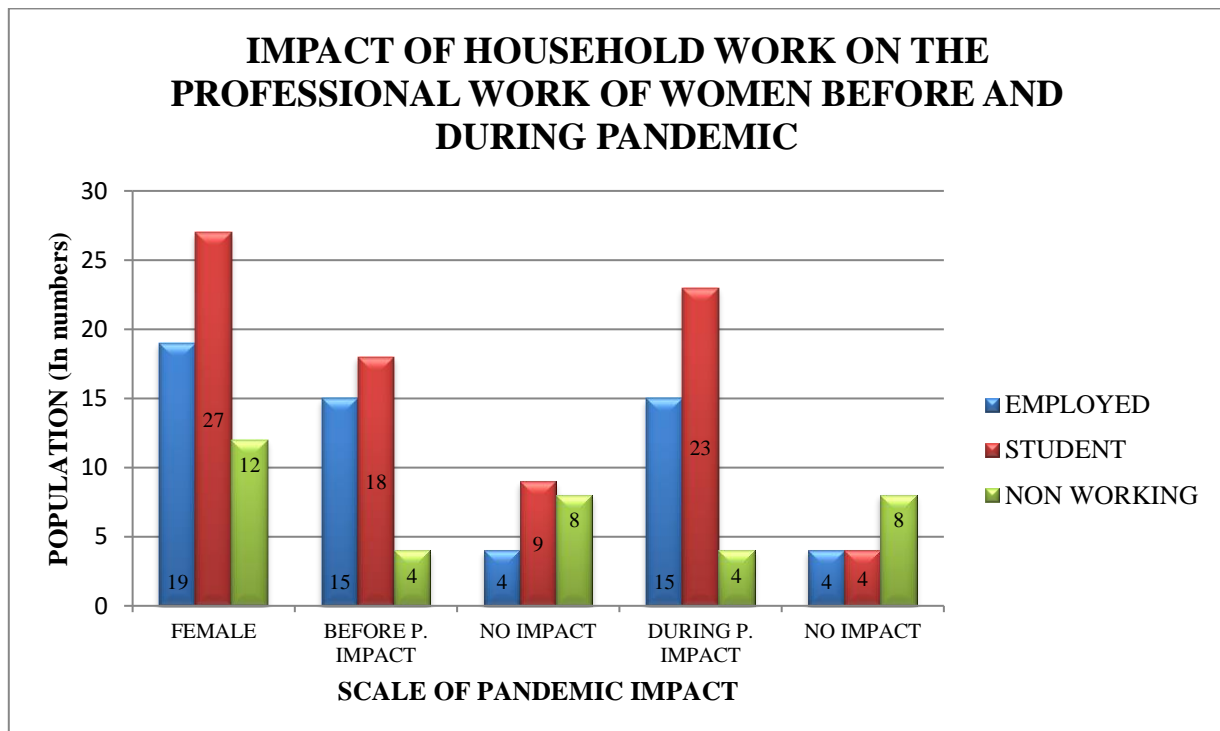


Fig-7. Source- data collected from the survey using Google form.

Although it is always has been a debatable note that the household work is meant for women. But in this changing world of 21st century women knows their value and can revolt against such notion. Household activities are unpaid and thus the involvement of men can be observed less as it does not provide any profit. Thus, it has been assigned to women to do it with love and selfless nature despite of it being a burden to her professional work and personal liberty.

For women, balancing the roles she plays in life and compromising with the dreams are inseparable from each other. Everyday women in each stage have to balance in every work she does. In a society like India has, in which women has to deal with the patriarchal norms since ages has not changed with due course of time. The intensity might have reduced a bit, yet the mentality is still the same. Although, the form of expressing patriarchy have changed due to the laws from the Supreme Court of India.

To some extend it won't be wrong to consider women being the obstacle creator for women itself. It is the mindset of female from old generations to suppress their voices against the unjust they are facing since long back to be considered as 'Aadarsh Stree' meaning 'Ideal Women. These notion has somewhat worked as a fuel among the men sect to practise patriarchy in an unhealthy manner, creating the world for women no less than a battle ground.

CONCLUSION

Women have been investing her life time working for family selflessly in both public and domestic sectors before pandemic, during pandemic and it will last the same post pandemic as well. Work from home, this system is not new for women. They have been working from home since ages from raising the child, caring for family, working extra to share good relationship with the neighbours and relatives, making food items and selling from home in small scale, etc. Working for home and family has never been an issue for women, perhaps, equal sharing, equal opportunity and appreciation of involvement in any work makes the difference. Never the less, men are also investing their every bit to earn for the family in general. Yet the proportion of sharing household work is not equally distributed among both the genders. This is the key to the increased inequality in terms of work, wage and rights based on gender.

For a developing country like India, the issues of gender inequality, quest for equal rights, quest for ethnic identity, etc. are no less than slow venom for the youths. The population of demographic dividend group is highest in India, yet its potentiality is not being utilised in a right way. Government should take care of these issues selflessly regardless of gender based societal practices. So that the potential youth can be invested for the development of the country, removing the gender biased ill notions which are socially constructed.

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